



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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Rep. Kind Stands With Veterans; Votes to Correct Shortage in VA Health Care

Expresses Disappointment House Leader Didn't Offer Full Immediate Fix

Washington, D.C. – Last evening, Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) voted to correct the \$1 billion shortfall in veterans' health care funding belatedly acknowledged by the Administration last week. Kind, however, expressed disappointment that the amount offered by House Republicans did not match that passed in the Senate, meaning funds will not get to VA medical facilities and veterans will continue to wait in lines for health care. VA Secretary Jim Nicholson also revealed this week that the department will need another \$1.5 billion to meet healthcare needs for the next fiscal year, bringing the total shortfall to \$2.5 billion.

Last Friday, the *Washington Post* reported that the Bush Administration acknowledged that it is short \$1 billion for covering current needs at the Department of Veterans Affairs this year, despite repeated efforts by House Democrats to fund VA healthcare. In response, the Senate voted unanimously on Wednesday to give the VA an extra \$1.5 billion this year to cover the health care shortfall. But House Republicans today offered just \$975 million, meaning additional work will have to be done to correct this serious problem.

"Today's vote is the first step in upholding our promise to our nation's veterans," said Rep. Kind. "But this amount does not match that offered by the Senate, meaning the problem is not solved, and veterans will continue to stand in line, waiting for the services they have earned. Sadly, the Administration and Congressional leadership are just waking up to this problem and coming late to the game to offer a fix, and I am disappointed they don't go far enough to immediately correct this."

Over the past two years, Rep. Kind and House Democrats have been standing with America's veterans fighting to increase support for veterans' health care. House Republicans consistently chose other priorities and voted no on veterans' healthcare, leading to a shortfall that did not have to happen. In the last week, House Republicans twice have blocked consideration of amendments offered by Democrats to add the needed funds for VA health care to various spending bills. [HR 3010, Vote #320, 6/24/05. Failed 185-216 HR 3057, Vote # 325, 6/28/05. Failed 217-189]. Kind, along with more than 200 other House Democrats, sent a letter to President Bush on Wednesday, urging the Administration to support emergency funding of VA health benefits.

"The fact that the House is standing here today, debating a fix to a problem that should have never happened, is a real disgrace," said Kind. "At a time of war, the American people want leaders who offer support and services for our veterans and their families, not partisan games and preventable mistakes."